



## DENALI NATIONAL PARK & PRESERVE 1995 MOUNTAINEERING SUMMARY

In 1995, 1,220 mountaineers registered to climb Mount McKinley. This is the second highest number ever to attempt Mount McKinley. (The record year was in 1994 with 1,277 climbers.) A total of 523 climbers reached the summit of Mt. McKinley this season, representing a 43% success rate.

Weather during the 1995 climbing season was stormy with high winds and few summit days. The marginal weather conditions prevented many expeditions from reaching the summit and was a large factor in several accidents. The season concluded with a total of six fatalities and involved 12 separate major mountaineering rescues in the Alaska Range.

Costs incurred by the National Park Service for Mount McKinley and Mount Foraker search and rescue (SAR) missions totaled \$126,246. The military costs associated with these SAR missions was \$292,416. This totals \$418,662 for SAR costs. Despite a reduction in the number of rescues, these costs were higher than the previous years due to lengthy rescues at high altitudes. The military was needed to assist on several high altitude rescues.

There was a decrease in the number of international climbers this year. In 1994 they represented 45% of the total number of climbers attempting Mt. McKinley. In 1995, their numbers dropped to 38% of the total. Increased investigation and enforcement of illegal guiding regulations were more than likely the contributing factors to this decline.

### NEW REGULATIONS



The National Park Service implemented a program designed to both enhance the educational outreach for Denali mountaineers and to defray the costs associated with managing mountaineering activities on Mt. McKinley and Mt. Foraker in 1995. In an effort designed to increase safety and to defray costs, this program includes a 60 day preregistration requirement and a Mountaineering Special Use Fee. With increasing numbers of climbers and decreasing budgets, the National Park Service designed this program to share a portion of these costs with those who benefit directly from the service provided.

Climbers were charged \$150.00 per person to climb Mt. McKinley or Mt. Foraker. The \$150.00 Mountaineering Special Use Fee covered unlimited climbing on these two mountains for the entire season.

All funds collected from the special use fee went directly to support the mountaineering program in Denali National Park. No funds were used to pay for rescue services. The fee provided for



two park rangers who were rotated for the first time at the Kahiltna base camp at 7,200 feet. These park rangers allowed the NPS a quicker response in rescue situations. They also greatly enhanced the cleanliness of lower glacier routes and were available to inform climbers of various route information.

In addition, fee money was used to rewrite, translate and publish the Denali National Park and Preserve Mountaineering booklet in several foreign languages. It is now available in English, German, French, Korean, Japanese and Spanish.

Late worldwide notice of the 60-day pre-registration requirement made compliance difficult for some expeditions in 1995. The pre-registration requirement was temporarily withdrawn for the 1995 season but was republished in the Federal Register on September 13, 1995. The National Park Service will require pre-registration for the 1996 climbing season.

Prospective climbers who request mountaineering packets from the Talkeetna Ranger Station in Denali National Park receive detailed information on the mountaineering special use fee and pre-registration.

#### **NEW DEVELOPMENTS:**

A new mountaineering contact station is being built in Talkeetna to accommodate climbers and visitors. It will contain two briefing rooms, (enabling multiple parties to be briefed simultaneously), a common area, a search and rescue cache, rescue command center, administrative offices and restrooms. The expected occupancy date is fall of 1996. Until that time, the log cabin on Main Street will continue to serve as the contact center.

#### **CONCESSIONS:**

Guide services in 1995 had a better success rate than private expeditions on Mt. McKinley, having 53% of guided clients summit as compared to 40% for non-guided. There were 327 guided clients representing 27% of the total climbers. Six companies are permitted to provide guide services on McKinley and Foraker. A list of these companies are included in mountaineering packets mailed to climbers planning their expeditions.

#### **SANITATION:**

Trash, left by inconsiderate climbers, is found along the West Buttress route especially on the lower glacier. During May, a storm dumped 8 feet of snow on the mountain up to the 12,000 foot level. Climbers who did not anticipate a large snowfall, and improperly marked their caches, lost them under the new snow. These caches were exposed later in the summer and became easy fodder for ravens, who raided the piles with little concern for neatness. It is mandatory to pack out all trash, extra food and fuel.


The latrine at high camp (17,200 feet) has prompted climbers to




defecate and urinate in one area. This improvement decreases the unsightly urine mounds and randomly dropped feces that in the past created a health hazard.

Rangers based at 7,000 feet patrolled the lower glacier recovering trash, cleaning up human waste and marking crevasses at the popular campsites for depositing human waste.

#### NEW ROUTES & NOTABLE ASCENTS:

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- Mt. McKinley and Mt. Foraker: First winter circumnavigation of both massifs by Daryl R. Miller and Mark Stasik. The two Talkeetnans' route involved an elevation gain/loss of 65,000 feet in 350 miles of backcountry route finding. They crossed four remote passes, one for the first time, traveled over 115 miles on 12 glaciers, 80 miles on rugged and diverse high mountain terrain, 125 miles on frozen rivers, creeks and lakes, and 30 miles amidst dense boreal forest, trackless bush and muskeg. Extreme Arctic conditions with winds over 100 mph and ambient temperatures of 58 F degrees below zero. Twenty-eight of the 45 day trip was 25 degrees below zero or colder.
  - Mt. McKinley: "First Born", a new route on the "Father and Sons Wall," climbed by Eli Helmuth and Steve House.
  - Mt. McKinley: Wickersham Wall was climbed and skied by a French team of Jean Noel Urban and Nicolas Bonhomme. They spent 13 days climbing the Canadian Route and two days skiing down.
  - Mt. McKinley: Youngest climbers to reach the summit: female, Merrick Johnson, age 12, male, Joshua Stewart, age 12.
  - Mt. Johnson: "The Elevator Shaft" was climbed by Jack Tackle on his third attempt with partner Doug Chabot. This strenuous route ascends a couloir on the North Face. The difficulties included: marginal protection, 90 degree snow and ice, and A3 rock.
  - Mt. Brooks: New route via the Southeast Face, climbed by Thai Verzone and Paul Snotherman.
  - Mt. Jeffers: In the Kichatna Spires, a new line on the Southwest Buttress, Dave Nettle and Geoff Creighton, they did not summit, rated at 5.9, A3.

#### SAFETY:



Travel during marginal weather played major roles in accidents that led to injuries and deaths this season. Expeditions need to be prepared to wait out unstable weather. Schedules, deadlines, and impatience are antagonists in making wrong decisions. The present day climbing style is much faster paced than the early expeditions on Mt. McKinley. In 1995, the average round trip ascent took 19 days. Overcrowding at the popular camps on the West Buttress route continues to be a serious issue.



\* The West Buttress saw 1,009 climbers which accounted for 82% of all mountain traffic.

\* The West Rib had 12 climbers attempting the upper section from the 14,200 foot basin. One hundred and eighteen climbers started the complete route from the Northeast Fork of the Kahiltna. This is an increase of 228% over last year's figure for climbers attempting the full route.

\* The Muldrow Glacier Route had 27 climbers attempting Mt. McKinley from the north side, a decrease of 47% from last year's total.

#### **MEDICAL:**

Sixty-nine climbers were afflicted with frostbite: 49 had superficial, 12 had moderate, and 8 had some tissue loss. This represents a **139% increase** in cases of frostbite over last year.

Of the 88 climbers who suffered from Aute Mountain Sickness; 66 were mild, 11 moderate, and 11 suffered from High Altitude Pulmonary or Cerebral Edema.

#### **ACCIDENTS/INCIDENTS**

#### **RESCUE:**

Twelve major mountaineering search and rescue missions were performed involving 22 climbers. Nine of the 22 climbers (41%) requiring rescue were international. Six deaths occurred in the 1995 season, all bodies were recovered. This brings the death total on McKinley to 85. Overall, just under two percent of the climbers required rescue, or one out of every 55 climbers. One climber out of every 203 died on the mountain. In 1994 there were 20 major rescues involving 31 climbers. The decrease this year in the number of rescues, might be attributed to the educational emphasis provided to climbers. Given the foul weather this year we feel fortunate to have not had more rescues and deaths.



Military personnel and Volunteers in Parks (VIP) performed several life saving rescue missions, preventing statistics that would have rivaled the tragic seasons of 1976 and 1992. The SAR missions were responded to by the combined efforts of the NPS, Alaska Air National Guard, U.S. Army High Altitude Rescue Team (HART), and VIP's. The following are summaries from the Case Incident Reports generated by these SAR missions.

**FATAL CLIMBING FALL, DENALI PASS:** On May 4, 1995, American Brian McKinley was fatally injured in a climbing fall on the West Buttress of Mt. McKinley. McKinley's climbing partner, Michael Angove, was injured when they both fell approximately 400 feet



from 17,800 feet just below Denali Pass. Angove landed in a crevasse and was able to extricate himself and reach a two-person climbing team at the 17,200 foot camp. He received care for the next five days during a storm which prevented several attempts by the National Park Service helicopter to pick him up. On May 9, the weather cleared enough for the NPS helicopter to rescue Angove from the 17,200 foot camp.

**PLANE CRASH, KAHILTNA BASE CAMP:** On May 25, 1995, a Geeting Aviation Cessna 185 flipped over on take off from the airstrip at Kahiltna base camp, 7,200 feet. The two passengers and pilot sustained minor injuries but did not require emergency evacuation. Five consecutive days of heavy snowfall made snow conditions soft, even on the packed airstrip. The weather system stranded 150 climbers at the Kahiltna base camp, where some of them exhausted their food supply. The NPS provided emergency food rations.

**THREE FATALITIES, WINDY CORNER, WEST BUTTRESS:** On May 26, 1995 three deceased American climbers; Thomas Downey, Scott Hall, and Jimmy Hinkhouse, were discovered at Windy Corner (13,300 feet) on Mt. McKinley. Previously on May 23, the expedition, along with 12 other climbers on the route, decided to abandon their climb and descend from 14,200 feet due to deteriorating weather conditions. At Windy Corner the 12 other climbers combined as one group and negotiated Windy Corner in desperate conditions. They encountered gale force winds caused by the terrain's funnel effect and bivouacked just above the pass. The American expedition chose to bivouac in a crevasse at Windy Corner. Since there were no survivors it is unknown as to the true cause of death. There is evidence that the snow bridge spanning the crevasse may have collapsed on the climbers. The medical examiner did not find any major trauma to support this theory. Hypothermia is also thought to be a factor in this tragedy.

**MEDICAL EMERGENCY, HEART PROBLEM, WEST BUTTRESS:** On May 26, 1995, a 55 year old Swiss climber, Dr. Paul Robadey, was flown from the 14,200' foot Ranger camp by the NPS helicopter to the 7,200 foot base camp. Robadey was diagnosed with atrial fibrillation by doctors serving as VIP's on an NPS mountain patrol.

**MEDICAL EMERGENCY, DEHYDRATION, WEST BUTTRESS:** On June 2, 1995 Canadian Robert Paige reported he was sick and could not stop vomiting. The 7,200 foot base camp ranger reached Paige at 7,800 feet on the Kahiltna Glacier. Paige was treated for dehydration and heat exhaustion and was evacuated by the NPS helicopter.

**MEDICAL EMERGENCY, INTERNAL BLEEDING, WEST BUTTRESS:** On June 2, 1995, American Tom Bohanon came to the ranger camp at 14,200 feet complaining of hemostasis (vomiting blood). Bohanon was examined and diagnosed as having an acute upper gastrointestinal bleed. Volunteer physicians assessed Bohanon's medical condition and felt his physical ailment was life threatening. Bohanon was evacuated by the NPS helicopter.



**FATAL FALL, UPPER WEST RIB:** On June 9, 1995, Albert Puig fell to his death and his climbing partners, Climent Lupon and Xavier Delgado Vives, were rescued by park service VIP's and the Army High Altitude Rescue Team. The Spanish climbing team was caught at their camp at 19,200 feet on the West Rib for four nights by a wind storm. The extended time at this altitude caused them to become physically weak and mentally debilitated. The three Spanish climbers made contact with a Civil Air Patrol member on June 8, who in turn made contact with the Talkeetna Ranger Station. On June 9, weather permitted the NPS rescue personnel and equipment to attempt rescue operations. During the initial operation the NPS helicopter was grounded due to a mechanical failure. The Army High Altitude Rescue Team was summoned to Denali. Before rescuers could reach the expedition, Albert Puig fell from just above the camp site while climbing at 19,200 feet. Puig was killed by the 4,200 foot fall. VIP's Alex Lowe, Scott Backes, and Marc Twight were helicoptered to the 19,600 foot plateau by an Army Chinook. They descended 400 feet to the Spanish camp. The VIP's assisted and carried the Spanish survivors back up to the 19,600 foot plateau, where the Chinook evacuated them. This Chinook, piloted by CW-3 Bill Barker, landed twice at 19,600'. This set a new altitude record for this type of helicopter.

**SKIING FALL, MT. FORAKER:** On June 11, 1995, John Montecucco fell while attempting a ski descent of Sultana Ridge on Mt. Foraker. Montecucco slid out of control approximately 2,000 feet before stopping at the edge of a 1,500 foot precipice. Members of his expedition assisted him to the 12,000' level. The Army's High Altitude Rescue Team, using a Chinook helicopter, winched a NPS rescue ranger and Montecucco up into the helicopter. Montecucco was transported to Talkeetna where he refused further medical assistance. Montecucco's injuries included a concussion, fractured ankle, bruised cartilage in his chest and a separated shoulder.

**EXPOSURE, FATALITY, WEST BUTTRESS:** On June 14, 1995, the NPS located three overdue Taiwanese climbers at the 19,400 foot elevation. VIP's, Alex Lowe and Conrad Anker, left the 14,200 foot Ranger Camp in an effort to reach the climbers. Lowe and Anker found Chiu Jui-Lin deceased from exposure and hypobaria. They assisted Dois Min Lin, and Min Chung Wu to 17,000 feet where an Army Chinook helicopter airlifted them to Talkeetna.

**AVALANCHE, FALL ON SNOWBOARD, MESSNER COULOIR:** On June 19, 1995, Japanese snowboarder Yamashita Takashi fell approximately 2,300 feet down the Messner Couloir. Takashi triggered a slab avalanche at 16,900 feet and was swept down the face through the "hour glass" to 14,600 feet. Several climbers were watching Takashi descend the couloir and reported the accident. Takashi was stabilized by physicians and volunteers and carried down to the ranger camp at 14,200 feet where he was treated for paraplegia, hemopneumothorax, hypothermia and frostbite. Takashi was evacuated by the NPS helicopter.



**AVALANCHE, SOUTH BUTTRESS:** On June 27, 1995, four Americans were caught in a wet slide avalanche on Denali. The climbers were carried 1,400 feet downhill and over two ice cliffs greater than 40 feet, coming to rest at 10,500 feet. Richard Rodger sustained injuries to the chest and clavicle. Jim Fitzsimmons sustained rib fractures, pulmonary contusion, a puncture wound to the thigh and a sprained ankle. The other climbers had minor injuries and were able to evacuate themselves from the mountain. Rodger and Fitzsimmons were shorthauled from their accident scene using the NPS helicopter.

**CREVASSE FALL, WEST BUTTRESS:** On June 28, 1995, Dominic Marshall and Reggie Perrin fell into a crevasse at 13,600 feet while ascending the West Buttress route of Denali. The British climbers were extricated by their party. Perrin was unhurt, but Marshall had pelvic injuries. The NPS helicopter evacuated Marshall.

## ALASKA RANGE STATISTICS:



MT. MCKINLEY	EXPEDITIONS	CLIMBERS	EXPEDITIONS	CLIMBERS
Cassin	13	30	9	18
Clod Face	1	1	0	0
Messner Couloir	1	2	1	2
Muldrow Glacier	5	27	2	19
Northwest Buttress	2	4	1	2
Northwest Face	1	2	0	0
South Buttress	4	15	2	5
West Buttress	230	968	116	388
West Buttress Tr	5	41	4	36
West Rib	33	118	16	43
Upper West Rib	3	12	3	9
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Total	298	1220	154	523

Mount McKinley summit success ratio for 1995 is 43%.



ROUTE FORAKER	ATTEMPTS		SUMMITS	
	EXPEDITIONS	CLIMBERS	EXPEDITIONS	CLIMBERS
Archangel Ridge	1	3	0	0
Infinite Spur	2	4	0	0
Sultana	4	10	2	5
Southeast Ridge	2	8	1	5
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Total	9	25	3	10

40% summit success ratio

OTHER MOUNTAINS	EXPEDITIONS	CLIMBERS
MT. HUNTER	13	33
MT. HUNTINGTON	3	7
MT. DAN BEARD	1	6
MT. SILVERTHRONE	2	3
MOOSES TOOTH	2	14
PEAK 11,300'	1	2

\* Because registration is voluntary for peaks other than Mt. McKinley and Mt. Foraker, these numbers do not represent the total number of groups and climbers making attempts on these mountains.





## *The South District Staff*

*South District Ranger:*  
*Administrative Tech:*  
*Mountaineering Rangers*

J.D. Swed  
Miriam Valentine

*Helicopter Manager:*  
*Helicopter Pilots:*

Daryl Miller  
Kevin Moore  
Roger Robinson  
Eric Martin  
Joe Reichert  
Dave Kreutzer  
Doug Drury  
Jim Hood  
Stan Bridges  
Punky Moore  
Grete Perkins  
Elaine Sutton

*Helicopter Mechanic:*  
*Fee Collectors:*

*Volunteers in the Park:*  
Dan Lowell  
Lada Kokan  
Marc Twilight  
Colin Grissom  
Tim Light  
Pete Athans  
Carl Coy  
Conrad Anker

John Whittingham  
Randy Waitman  
Scott Backes  
Vince Langmann  
Howard Donner  
Liz Greene  
Alex Lowe  
Colby Coombs

*Alaska Air National Guard:*

*Canadian PJ's*

MSgt Paul Reddington  
TSgt Steve Dagle  
TSgt Eric Sachs  
SSgt Greg Hopkins  
SSgt Eric Taylor

SAR TEC John Oaks

To request mountaineering information and forms for registration,  
please contact:

**Talkeetna Ranger Station**  
**P.O. Box 588**  
**Talkeetna, Alaska 99676**  
**Telephone: (907)733-2231**  
**FAX: 907 733 1465**

J.D. Swed  
South District Ranger, Denali National Park and Preserve